

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
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AMEMBASSY PARIS
USLO PEKING
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON
CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SINGAPORE 3108

E.OM QQYTWC GDS
TAGS: OTRA, PEPR, SN, VN
SUBJECT: PRESS COMMENT ON SRV DEPUTY FONMIN PHAN HIEN VISIT
TO SINGAPORE

REF: (A) STATE 174899, (B) SINGAPORE 3109

1. SINGAPORE PRESS HAS CARRIED WIRE SERVICE ACCOUNTS OF PHAN
HIEN VISIT TO TOKYO AND COMMENTS ON PROSPECTS FOR US-SRV NORMALI-
ZATION, BUT EDITORIAL COMMENT TO DATE FOCUSES ON SRV-ASEAN
RELATIONS.

2. IN JULY 10 ANNOUNCEMENT OF PHAN HIEN VISIT, CHINESE LANGUAGE
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NANYANG SIANG PAU SPECULATED THAT CHANGED VIETNAMESE POLICY
TOWARD ASEAN IS RESULT OF WORSENING RELATIONS WITH CHINA AND
CHANGED INTERNATIONAL SITUATION. ATTITUDE OF CAUTIOUS
WELCOMING OF VIETNAMESE OVERTURES IS REFLECTED IN STRAITS TIMES
(AND MALAY LANGUAGE SISTER PAPER, BERITA HARIAN) EDITORIALS.
THESE FREQUENTLY REFLECT OFFICIAL VIEWS. JULY 8 STRAITS TIMES
EDITORIAL COMMENTS ON PHAN HIEN'S STATEMENTS IN TOKYO AND, WHILE

WELCOMING VIETNAMESE "VOLTE-FACE" ON ASEAN, CAUTIONS AGAINST
ASEAN BEING DRAWN INTO VIETNAM'S DISPUTE WITH CHINA. TEXT
FOLLOWS:

"AN UNVOICED QUESTION IN THE MINDS OF MANY NON-COMMUNIST
SOUTH-EAST ASIAN LEADERS AS THEY WATCH THE RAPID FALLING-OUT
BETWEEN VIETNAM AND CHINA APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN ANSWERED FOR THEM
BY VIETNAMESE VICE FOREIGN MINISTER PHAN HIEN RECENTLY IN TOKYO.
THE QUESTION THAT HAS OCCUPIED MANY POLITICAL MINDS IS: WILL
VIETNAM'S GROWING DIFFICULTIES CAUSE IT TO MOVE CLOSER TO ITS
NON-COMMUNIST NEIGHBOURS, IN PARTICULAR THE ASEAN MEMBERS.
IN TALKS WITH JAPANESE PRIME MINISTER TAKEO FUKUDA, MR. HIEN
HAS SAID VIETNAM IS PREPARED TO DEAL WITH ASEAN AS A REGIONAL
ORGANISATION WHICH IT NOW REGARDS AS A NON-MILITARY GROUPING.
IT IS A VOLTE-FACE IN VIETNAM'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS ASEAN, WHICH
IT HAS IN THE PAST SPURNED, VIEWING IT AS A US-INSPIRED OPERATION
AND PREFERRING TO DEAL WITH EACH OF ITS INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS ON A
BILATERAL BASIS. INDEED IT EVEN CHALLENGED THE CREDENTIALS
OF THE ASEAN MEMBERS AT THE NON-ALIGNED CONFERENCE IN COLOMBO
IN 1976 AND ROUNDLY ATTACHED THE ASEAN PROPOSAL OF A ZONE OF
PEACE, FREEDOM AND NEUTRALITY. (BUT NOW IT HAS PLEDGED ITS
READINESS TO WORK WITH ASEAN ON WAYS TO CREATE A ZONE OF PEACE
AND NEUTRALITY IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA.)

"THIS ABOUT-FACE IN VIETNAM'S POLICY TOWARDS ASEAN, LIKE
ITS RECENTLY DECLARED DESIRE TO RESUME NORMAL RELATIONS WITH
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THE US WITHOUT PRECONDITIONS, IS UNDOUBTEDLY CONNECTED WITH ITS
GROWING DIFFICULTIES WITH CHINA. ANY FRIENDLY GESTURE FROM
VIETNAM WILL, OF COURSE, BE WELCOMED BY ASEAN, WHOSE MEMBERS
HAVE ALREADY BEEN EXTENDING A CONCILIATORY HAND TOWARDS HANOI
DESPITE THE HARDLINE STANCE IT TOOK IN COLOMBO TOWARDS THE
GROUPING. HOWEVER, ASEAN MEMBER STATES WILL STUDY THE CHANGE
IN VIETNAMESE FOREIGN POLICY WITH CAUTION WHILE GUARDING AGAINST
BEING DRAWN INTO ITS GROWING DISPUTE WITH CHINA. THEY NOW FIND
THAT THEIR ALLIANCE, ONCE SCORNEED BY ITS COMMUNIST CRITICS,
IS RECEIVING THEIR SERIOUS ATTENTION--NO DOUBT FROM AN EAGERNESS
TO SCORE POINTS WITH THEIR NON-COMMUNIST SOUTH-EAST ASIAN
NEIGHBOURS. HANOI'S INTENTION TO HAVE AN INDEPENDENT FOREIGN
POLICY, IF TRUE, SHOULD BE A WELCOME THING FOR ASEAN STATES,
AS THEY ARE ANXIOUS NOT TO SEE THE INTRODUCTION OF A RUSSIAN
MILITARY PRESENCE IN MAINLAND SOUTH-EAST ASIA."
INGRAHAM

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